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Wang, X.; Spotti, Max; Juffermans, K.C.P.

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Paper 73

Globalization in the margins

by

Xuan Wang[©]

(x.wang@tilburguniversity.edu)

Massimiliano Spotti[©]

(m.spotti@tilburguniversity.edu)

Kasper Juffermans[©]

(kasper.juffermans@uni.lu)

Leonie Cornips[©]

(leonie.cornips@maastrichtuniversity.nl)

Sjaak Kroon[©]

(s.kroon@tilburguniversity.edu)

Jan Blommaert[©]

(j.blommaert@tilburguniversity.edu)

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Xuan Wang

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1. Introduction

This paper will discuss sociolinguistic globalization phenomena in ‘marginal’ environments. It will tackle globalization and its sociolinguistic implications from the perspective of new media and communication technologies, of new forms of economic activity and, last but not least, from the perspective of legitimacy in the contentious struggle between commodification of language and other semiotic resources and authenticity, asking whether claims on who has the right to produce, own, market and distribute authentic tokens of ethno-local belonging can still be advanced. While globalization in the margins appears straightforward and unproblematic, it is vital for our discussion here, that its parameters are clearly defined.

In its general sense, globalization is not a new, not even a recent process. Parts of the world were of course connected throughout recorded history, large migrations have been perennial in almost any part of the world, and large trade networks connecting contemporary continents have also existed for millennia. What is *now* called globalization, therefore, is a particular historical phase in which interconnectedness and mobility acquired unprecedented — indeed, global — scale levels. According to historians such as Hobsbawm (2007) and Wallerstein (2000), this historical phase coincides with the global expansion of capitalism, and it can, in turn, be broken down in shorter periods of development. The colonial era was such an era of deepened globalization (Mufwene 2010), and the post-Cold War era followed by a

re-definition of the world order that extends till the present time is another one. As a consequence, it has brought us intensified global flows, both in volume and in speed, of people, goods, capital and symbolic social, political and cultural objects including language and other semiotic resources. The advent of the internet and related mobile communication technologies has been instrumental to this stage of acceleration in globalization processes, adding a hyper-dynamic layer of communication, knowledge and information mobility to the increased levels of physical human mobility.

One of the metaphors handed down from history and social geography (Swyngedouw 1996; Uitermark 2002) as well as world system analysis (Wallerstein 2004) is that of scales. A concept that in its most basic form points toward the fact that socio-cultural events and semiotic processes of meaning making develop not along a horizontal continuum of spread, rather they develop and move on a vertical and stratified continuum of layered scales. Globalization, as we understand it here revolves therefore around scales and the semiotic reifications taking place within and across them. It involves connections between local phenomena and phenomena occurring at higher, translocal scale-levels, and effects of such connections at all scale-levels involved.

One of the contemporary outcomes of this stage of globalization is called superdiversity: the ‘diversification of diversity’ (Vertovec 2007, 2010) consisting of an increased number of new, small grouped, multiple-origin, scattered yet transnationally connected, socio-economically differentiated, legally stratified people that move to new places and organize their lives with the assistance offered by new technologies. Urban areas all over the world are now seen not just as ‘multicultural’ and ‘multilingual’, but as superdiverse spaces in which a range of hitherto poorly studied and understood social, cultural and political forms of complexity come to emerge (Arnaut 2013 provides an overview).

In sociolinguistics, these developments have been addressed in a wave of recent scholarship, often attempting to find descriptively adequate terminology for the complex phenomena observed: terms such as ‘linguaging’ and ‘polylinguaging’, ‘transidiomatic practices’, ‘supervernaculars’, ‘metrolingualism’, ‘translinguaging’ and so forth all represent such attempts to break out of a methodological system currently experienced as constraining and in dramatic need of upgrading (see Blommaert and Rampton 2011 for a survey and discussion). Such terms were coined in order to be able to analyze *new* forms of communication emerging in typically

superdiverse environment such as contemporary inner-city schools (e.g., Creese and Blackledge 2010; Jørgensen et al. 2011; Madsen et al. 2013; Rampton 2006); new forms of diaspora experiences emerging on the ground and being spread through the web (Machetti and Siebetchu 2013; Li et al. 2012) as well as online environments (Leppänen and Hakkinen 2013; Varis and Wang 2011; Wang et al. 2012).

The phenomena encountered raised such analytic challenges that traditional approaches based on the descriptive and analytic stability of key notions such as ‘language’ and ‘community’, and in second order of universally used qualifiers such as ‘ethnic’, ‘national’ and ‘religious’ (to name just a few) had to be replaced by a new vocabulary and toolkit in which very little was taken for granted. This methodological effort, however, quickly spilled over into ‘atypical’ domains: it was gradually realized that the new tools of work on language and superdiversity could also be applied on older and more common phenomena in the field of language, communication and identity, and that the new phenomenology of sociolinguistic superdiversity could serve as a prompt to look across the entire field of studies for renewed and more refined analysis (Silverstein 2013; also Blommaert 2013a; Makoni 2012). An awareness of the scalar and polycentric nature of communicative environments, of the connectedness and simultaneity of action by people across large distances, of mobility as a key element in imagining the social, sociolinguistic and cultural world: all of these elements are now increasingly seen as default elements in a new, post-Fishmanian sociolinguistic imagination (Blommaert 2010; Pennycook 2007, 2012).

This prompt also worked in another direction, and this direction is central to this paper. Work on globalization and superdiversity has been concentrated on typical sites where features and phenomena are abundantly available: the huge contemporary metropolis with its explosive and conspicuous diversity in people and languages, its hyper-mobility and constant flux. Less typical places — peri-urban and rural areas, peripheral areas of countries, peripheral zones of the world, peripheral institutional zones where minorities are relegated — have been less quickly absorbed into current scholarship. Yet, upon closer inspection, there is no reason to exclude these ‘margins’ from analyses of globalization processes. Globalization is a transformation of the entire world system, and it does not only affect the metropolitan centers of the world but also its most remote margins. Thus, we are bound to encounter globalization effects, and features of superdiversity, also in highly unexpected places.

A survey of this will be the topic of this paper. We shall suggest a specific angle from which such forms of globalization in the margin can be most usefully addressed. But before that, we need to briefly turn to the field of globalization studies and make a principled case for an open and ‘complete’ approach.

2. An urban bias?

Cities, wherever they are, are dense concentrations of resources: of populations and of their infrastructures. Such infrastructures include governmental, administrative-bureaucratic services; economic and financial centers; layered labor, housing and commodity markets; centers of knowledge and learning such as schools and universities; hospitals, sports, culture and leisure facilities. Cities, consequently, are social, cultural and political laboratories where innovations appear if not first, then surely most overtly and visibly.

In the field of globalization studies, and spurred early on by Peter Hall (1966) and later by Saskia Sassen (1991) and Janet Abu-Lughod (1999), the gaze of scholars has been quite firmly on urban environments (see, e.g., Abrahamson 2004; Connell 2000; Derudder et al. 2012). Such global cities were described as concentrations of various forms of power — which is not new — but also as crucial nodes in new worldwide networks of economic, financial, political and information activities now effortlessly transcending the borders of the nation-state and shaping new global hierarchical relationships (Castells 1996; Taylor 2004). The urban condition, so it was announced, has changed; an important part of that change was a transformation towards an urban ‘vernacular globalization’ in which diasporic and sedentary populations now created new forms of cultural and social life (Appadurai 1996).

In the field of sociolinguistic studies of globalization, the urban bias has also been observed, though to a lesser extent and with more nuance. It is outspoken in the sub-field of linguistic landscaping (e.g., Backhaus 2007; Shohamy and Gorter 2009; also Blommaert 2013b; Pan Lin 2009; Scollon and Scollon 2003), and it is also true that many of the recent studies on sociolinguistic superdiversity are driven by data from globalized urban contexts (e.g., Blommaert et al. 2005; Cornips and De Rooij 2013; Creese and Blackledge 2010; Harris 2006; Jørgensen et al. 2011; Li Wei 2011; Sharma and Rampton 2011; Rampton 1995, 2006). But at the same time, such urban-

based studies have quite systematically been complemented with work on more peripheral contexts and we shall highlight some of that work below.

In that sense, the sociolinguistics of globalization extends the general trend in the sociolinguistic tradition, where work on urban contexts always went side by side with work on smaller and more peripheral communities. William Labov investigated language variation both in New York City and on the more peripheral island of Martha's Vineyard; John Gumperz worked in metropolitan London but also based some of his most groundbreaking insights on work done in India and in small villages in Norway; Dell Hymes investigated both inner-city Philadelphia and the Warm Springs Reservation in Oregon; Michael Silverstein, also active in Warm Springs, combined work among aboriginal communities in Australia with analyses of outspokenly American urban phenomena such as the discourse of wine connoisseurs; and Erving Goffman attended both to the behavior of people in public spaces in the big US cities and to that of inmates in mental hospitals. Landmark collections from the first generation of sociolinguists are telling; see the mixture of urban-Western and rural-Nonwestern studies in Hymes (1964) and Gumperz and Hymes (1986 [1972]); and recall Joshua Fishman's early preoccupation with language problems in the Third World (Fishman et al. 1968). Whatever we currently have in the way of robust theory in our field is the product of studies on a broad variety of contexts. Note that this also counts for sub-fields such as educational linguistics and literacy studies.

There is also very little fundamentally or principally wrong with work on urban environments. One would not wish to argue that Labov's examinations of language variation in New York City were flawed *because they were urban*, or that Gumperz's insights into metaphorical code-switching were brilliant *because they were rural*. One would also find it not easy to argue that studies such as Labov's cannot be profitably applied to rural environments, or Gumperz's to urban ones.

What would be wrong, of course, would be a sociolinguistics that studies *only* and *exclusively* urban environments, because a comprehensive, a 'complete' sociolinguistics requires input from every possible environment in the world. It is the importance of comprehensiveness that pushes us towards more attention to studies in the periphery, because in the field of language-and-globalization studies, the current sample is unbalanced, so to speak, with far more work done on urban-central than on rural-peripheral environments. There is an analytical gap that causes our knowledge of peripheral parts of the globe to be inferior compared to that of more central parts of

the world system. A science that would bridge this gap — a mature sociolinguistics of globalization — would be an extremely useful bedrock for applied and adjacent studies on language in society.ⁱ

Much more serious, however, is the danger of a *metropolitan* bias in our fields: the danger of seeing the world through the lens of those societies that form the current centers of the world system, with the assumption that what occurs there can and should be used as benchmark for studies elsewhere. This bias and its risks of theoretical impoverishment were powerfully thematized by, e.g., Canagarajah (1999), Makoni and Pennycook (2007) and Shi-xu (2009); it was a crucial argument in Blommaert's critique of discourse analysis (2005: 13–16) as well as in critical discussions of World Englishes and English teaching in a global context (e.g., Canagarajah 2006; Park and Wee 2012), where scholars now strongly advocate a 'decentered' perspective and emphasize the local conditions of emergence and development of the language (e.g., Blommaert 2010; Higgins 2009; Pennycook 2010; Sargeant 2009).

The issue here is more serious because it is of theoretical importance. It relates to old debates about 'emic' or 'insider' views: in order to understand how people organize, structure, and render meaningful their world, pre-scripted assumptions always need to be carefully balanced against what these people themselves articulate and offer as explanations — theory from below, the cornerstone of the ethnographic tradition. In research, this issue is connected to that of voice: how do we actually *get* this theory from below to inform our findings (Hymes 1996; Juffermans and Van der Aa 2013)? Answers to this question may differ, but share one general direction: we cannot neglect the detailed analysis of local contexts of usage, local semiotic economies and local language ideologies if we wish to understand how people themselves make sense of their lives and life worlds.

Whether such local conditions are urban or rural is *per se* immaterial, and it would be perilous to a priori assume any level of substantive and nontrivial stability or predictability on the basis of the urban-rural diacritic. Urban environments differ tremendously — compare, e.g., Hackney with Soweto — and the same goes for rural environments. In each case, the point is to do the substantial work of inquiry and analysis, and avoid research frontloaded with a priori assumptions. What brings cases

together can be, and is, often far more specific. To such specific features we now direct our attention.

3. Infrastructures of globalization

We stated at the outset that globalization revolves around scales and movements across scales. Such movements do not occur in a random fashion, they are structured and conditioned, and the major condition for globalization processes is the availability and accessibility of *infrastructures for globalization*. What is needed is access to instruments enabling connections between purely local events and translocal processes, patterns and developments, and these connections are dialectic: effects of them occur throughout the different scale levels.

We will therefore encounter globalization processes in peripheral places whenever such conditioning infrastructures are present there. The distribution of such infrastructures is not necessarily democratically organized, and peripheral areas can be characterized by *partial* access to *specific* infrastructures for globalization, differing by degree from the overwhelming concentration of such infrastructures in global cities. The effects of such partial access are *specific* forms of practice holding a hierarchical — inferior — position relative to what happens in more central parts. Focusing on infrastructures in the study of globalization, therefore, invites considerations of old and new forms of inequality between centers and peripheries, a relatively enduring aspect of the continuously changing world system. It also leads us to a precise identification of the margins: they are characterized by unequal access to infrastructures of globalization; thus, naturally, they can be located in cities as well as in the rural areas.

In what follows, we shall highlight three forms of globalization in the margins provoked by specific levels and forms of access to certain infrastructures of globalization: (1) new media and communication technologies; (2) new forms of economic activity, specifically call centers and heritage tourism and (3) new (re)productions of local identity formations driven by power asymmetries between people living in the center and periphery in a nation state (Cornips et al. 2012).

We shall see that all these three forms of globalization trigger complex processes of sociolinguistic and cultural reordering and invite examination of several side

effects. We offer these points here not as a comprehensive survey of globalization in the margins; rather, they should serve as examples of such processes and how they can be studied, to be extended by complimentary research.

3.1. New forms of mediated communication technologies

People who wish to purchase state-of-the-art technologies of global communication must reserve a substantial amount of money. Contemporary standard equipment in this zone of human conduct involves a high-end smartphone, a tablet, possibly a laptop or desktop computer, a flat screen HD television, and a subscription to high quality and high speed WIFI and/or wired broadband Internet access. Thus equipped, the contemporary communicator can access and produce almost unrestricted amounts of information all the time, from and to any place on earth where such facilities exist.

Such supreme levels of “being on” (Baron 2008) are evidently extraordinarily exclusive, and in most parts of the world people have to be satisfied with significantly less. Access to high-speed broadband, for instance, is seriously unequal around the globe. In 2011, Europeans had access to an average bandwidth of 90,000 bits per second, while Africans had to be happy with an average of 2,000 bits per second: an Internet that works 45 times slower than the average European connection.ⁱⁱ Access to mobile phone technologies, by contrast, has boomed in Africa, and over the last decade Africans (as well as many other people in the peripheries of the world system) have ‘gone mobile’ in a big way (see Deumert and Lexander 2013 and Velghe 2012a for discussions of Africa).

This does not mean, however, that the actually available instruments, and the modes of action they afford, are equally shared. In an insightful paper, Lemphane and Prinsloo (2013) show how deeply different and unequal access to mobile technologies can be in conditions of extreme social inequality: children in two South African families, both of the same ethnic and linguistic background, have fundamentally different possibilities depending on the material inequalities that determine their lives. One, a middle-class family, has access to advanced broadband Internet search facilities, online gaming and multi-channel television enabling lots of multilingual learning interaction; the other, living in a nearby township, has no access to Internet and must be satisfied with a much simpler mobile phone allowing individual, silent and uniform types of entertainment.

Notwithstanding such tremendous differences, however, access to Internet (in its highly diverse qualities) and to mobile phone technology has created an infrastructure for globalization in the margins: areas hitherto relatively isolated can now be connected with other areas, and messages, information and forms of cultural expression now flow to and from such peripheral areas. This has several effects, and we shall select two prominent ones.

One prominent effect is that the integration of margins into large networks of mobile communication *creates a vast and layered market* for popular forms of cultural expression. *Marginal performances can make it to the mainstream* by means of access — however limited — to contemporary media and communication technologies. Hip-hop is a case in point, and an expanding literature documents the emergence and growing prominence of hip-hop ‘from the margins’ within the global market of popular culture (Alim et al. 2009; Pennycook 2007; Stapleton 1998). Hip-hop, with its cultural and political emphasis on ‘authenticity from below’, lends itself to articulations from individuals and communities outside of the mainstream of society, and we witness a boom in ‘vernacular’ hip-hop — hip-hop using local dialects or minority and endangered languages (e.g., Pietikainen 2008 and Ridanpää and Pasanen 2009 on rap in Sami language; Hornberger and Swinehart 2012 on rap in Aymara and Quechua).

First, access to translocal scale-levels in such instances provides new linguistic and semiotic affordances. Wang (2012, 2013) discusses the complex language usage of a rapper from Enshi, a very peripheral (ethnic minority) region in Hubei Province, China. Significantly, the rapper in question was discovered by Wang from Europe through the Internet; his work circulates globally. The rapper himself was an inconspicuous figure in his community: a school dropout who had been to jail for minor offences, and lived unemployed in a small room with his parents. The room had access to Internet, however, and this gateway to (at least significant portions of) the world had exposed him to American as well as Chinese and other Asian hip-hop. The influences of this exposure were palpable in the rapper’s work: in his lyrics, he would produce complex and nonrandom forms of code- and style-shifting, in which local Enshi dialect features would alternate with Standard Mandarin ones as well as with vernacular ‘hip-hop English’. The code-alternation was not just acoustic: the rapper published his lyrics on a website, and in the written versions Chinese simplified character script would alternate with roman alphabet, evidently whenever

English forms were used, but also (and considerably less evidently) whenever local Enshi vernacular forms were used. In his lyrics, thus, the Enshi rapper used semiotic resources he had gathered from other, translocal scale-levels — the scale of the Chinese nation and the scale of global hip-hop — and had deployed them in unique semiotic arrangements displaying a highly developed sense of the indexical opportunities and affordances offered by blending such resources.

This ‘scale jumping’, through which people from the margins can access through new media and mobile technologies resources not otherwise present in their local environments, has effects on *linguistic vitality* and on real people who would otherwise be stuck in the margins. Small minority (and often endangered) languages can acquire a new lease of life through mediated translocal circulation. All the studies referred to here underscore this: previously marginal language groups can now access scales of exposure and uptake not available prior to the advent of the new technologies enabling the scale-jumping on which exposure and uptake depend. This also has effects on their broader cultural traditions, now also circulating in novel and dynamic ways (Higgins 2009: Ch.5; Malm 1993).

Second, these new possibilities do not leave these languages untouched, though, and the second point we wish to discuss is *language* change as an outcome of access to new media and communication technologies. In our discussion of Wang’s study of the Enshi rapper we already encountered this: access to vital, new infrastructures of globalization creates a space for importing and deploying language resources from ‘elsewhere’, and the true creativity of popular culture artists is often nested in the capacity to produce innovative and complex forms of ‘mixing’ often amounting to new local-and-global forms of slang (e.g., Becker and Dastile 2008; Machin and Van Leeuwen 2004; Pardue 2004; Pennycook 2003; Wang 2013; Williams 2012).

Such new forms of language variation are a general effect, noticeable in almost every context in which new media and mobile communication technologies are present. The emergence and viral spread of phone texting codes, for instance, is beginning to be documented, also in the margins of the world system (e.g., Deumert and Lexander 2013; Velghe 2012a). The creative, yet quickly ‘standardized’ register of abbreviations and acronyms, peppered with an abundant usage of emoticons, is surely one of the highly visible language effects of the new media and technologies environment. Users experience it as highly effective and engaging, and as a tool for expanding and maintaining intense contacts with a network of addressees. What is

often underestimated, though, is the sometimes extreme difficulty experienced by novice users of texting codes in acquiring the level of embodied enskillment required for seemingly simple texting operations; still, and in spite of such limitations, gaining access to texting skills can have significant effects on people's lives (see Velghe 2012b for an insightful study). In that sense, access to new media and mobile literacies displays the structural features of inequality observed in more traditional (pen-and-paper) literacies (cf. Juffermans 2010; Juffermans and Van Camp 2013).

Another feature of language change that scholars begin to explore is the effect of access to the new media and communication technologies on local or regional dialects. The rural areas where such dialects are used are no longer isolated places: migrant farm workers have diversified the community, and as we have seen earlier, even rural and remote areas have access to new media. Mutsaers and Swanenberg (2012) describe how young people from a rural area in The Netherlands developed a 'hyper-dialect' influenced by a popular television comedy program in which this regional dialect — from the same region as the young speakers — was widely used. Exposure to popular media here provokes the transformation of local dialects, in such a way that dialects are still experienced as 'our own' while they have been infused with new indexical orders of belonging, ownership and legitimate usage. Similar complex transformations of local dialects have been observed among immigrant youngsters elsewhere (e.g., Jaspers 2008; Spotti 2007), and the phenomenon is clearly germane to the changes in minority languages discussed above.

We conclude our discussion of the first major infrastructure of globalization here. We have seen that access to such infrastructures in the margins is often very limited compared to the levels of access prevailing in more central parts of the world system; but we have seen that in spite of these constraints, the advent of new media and communication technologies has had several, and major, effects on languages, language practices, and language relations in the margins. This, we believe, is a field of inquiry that awaits expansion and deepening.

3.2. New forms of economic activity

Globalization is among many other things an economic process, in which, following Wallerstein (2004), we see a global division of labor emerge. This global division of labor — driven by worldwide fiscal and wage competition — has created structures of

economic dependency between various parts of the world; it has also created new forms of economic activity reflecting positions in the world system. We shall briefly address both aspects.

Outsourcing, offshoring, and delocalizing are firmly entrenched and emblematic features of the global economic landscape and its division of labor, notably in the so-called service industries. One especially conspicuous and interesting type of business in that domain is the widespread use of global call-centers, often located in the peripheries of the world, with a notable concentration in South Asia (cf. Shome 2006; Taylor and Bain 2005 for general discussions). In the areas where they are located, call center jobs are a sometimes unique opportunity for upward social mobility, especially among young and educated women, and the mass employment of young people in call centers has led to supportive state responses in language policy (e.g., Morgan and Ramanathan 2009; Rahman 2009). Fluency in (nonnative) English is a requirement, since call center agents from, say, India, communicate with customers in Europe and North America and need to pass — linguistically — unnoticed (Poster 2007); consequently, a booming support industry selling American accent has emerged (Blommaert 2010: 47–61).

Thus we see how globally operating call centers affect the sociolinguistic economy and ecology of more peripheral areas. Similar effects occur across the field of a globalizing economic landscape, in which peripheries are networked with centers as well as with other peripheries, and in which a spectacular new market of language and accent emerges, shaping new and complex forms of multilingualism (see, e.g., Rasanen 2012 for a case discussion of a Finnish engineer working with Chinese colleagues).

There is more however, and we can see the above as one part of a broader picture of economic transformations. In a series of influential studies, Monica Heller (2003, 2010a, 2010b) demonstrated how in the new global economy, specific niches are created in which languages along with ‘authentic’ identities are commodified. This is evident in the case of English — see our remarks on the call centers — but it also affects small, regional and local languages and dialects. The niche is tourism, or more specifically what is now called ‘heritage tourism’ ‘cultural tourism’ or ‘eco-tourism’ (cf. Orams 1995; Poria et al. 2003; see Jaworski and Pritchard 2005 for important discussions on the role of language in tourism).

Heritage tourism reflects the stratification of the globalized world system, because it is often situated in very marginalized areas, often populated by minorities and marked by economic poverty, and it is very often the only viable form of economic activity available to the local people (Hinch 2004; Ryan and Aicken 2005). The essence of heritage tourism revolves around an imagery of an unspoiled environment, both natural and cultural, and often crucially including the presence and performance of local languages and cultural (ritual) traditions: the fragile natural and cultural environment that can evoke a sense of nostalgia of wilderness and adventure in the consumer.

The key term, and the major commodity, is ‘authenticity’. And in order to produce and market such authenticity, its producers often need to resolve to what Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983) famously called ‘the invention of tradition’. Groups need to design and perform ‘tabloid histories’ of their own past (Halewood and Hannam 2001: 567), as well as newly designed and adjusted ‘traditional’ costumes, food, rituals and language forms (see Amoamo 2007 on the Maori in New Zealand; Wang 2013 on the Tujia in China). The outcome, naturally, is something entirely new, a reflection (or refraction) of local traditions and customs mediated by, and tailored for, nonlocal audiences and for local economic and political needs as well as based on globally available templates for what ‘authenticity’ in heritage tourism might mean.

It is evident that heritage tourism can contribute to the survival and vitality of local, often endangered languages and forms of language usage. It has, in that sense, an effect not dissimilar from the one we discussed when we looked at the effects of new media and communication technologies earlier. And very much like the earlier point, heritage tourism can contribute to the *global circulation* of otherwise very marginal language material. Terms such as *aloha* (Hawai’an) and *hakuna matata* (Swahili) are global currency due to such processes. Such emblematic minority or marginalized language forms can also be consciously used and deployed by states to flag their multicultural and multilingual ideologies (Bell 1999). This rarely works as an engine for fundamental change — minorities will still be minorities — and in that sense, heritage tourism is an economic activity indicative of the marginality of groups developing it. But, at the same time, it offers at least a symbolic recognition of existence and legitimacy. For local people, heritage tourism at least creates a (sometimes lucrative) space of entrepreneurship, a labor market, and some degree of

ownership and control over their own local material and cultural resources and the exploitation thereof (for the latter, see Bendix et al. 2012).

3.3. New forms of local identification

Another feature of new forms of language variation and change is the sociolinguistic and language-ideological *restratification* which is an effect of the interrelations of new shapes of local identities through language practices (and more general semiotic ones) driven by power asymmetries between people living in the center and periphery in a nation state, and stimulated by some of the phenomena discussed above. These power asymmetries can, but need not be, ‘real’ in the sense that they can be measured in, e.g., economic strength. What is important is that people experience a difference between center and periphery and that those inhabiting the (perceived) periphery feel marginalized economically, politically, culturally, and linguistically by the (perceived) center

Cornips et al. (2011, 2012) focus on language practices as the key locus of identity formation because language is an indispensable means for people to construct social relations and to project social identities. Moreover, the center-periphery dynamics is often played out directly in terms of linguistic differentiation. In most countries of the world, one finds a deeply entrenched language ideology that is built on the unquestioned principle that a nation-state should be linguistically homogeneous (cf. Blommaert and Verschueren 1998). Linguistic uniformity is achieved by awarding the status of national language to the language spoken in the center of political and economic power. This standardized national language is imposed on speakers of non-standard varieties or other languages and these non-standard varieties with their speakers are often negatively stereotyped as “backward”. Note that popular culture and media often contribute to this process, as Mutsaers & Swanenberg’s study, mentioned above, demonstrated (see also Agha 2007 for a general discussion)

In response to this kind of marginalization local languages are often consciously made into, i.e., socially and politically constructed as objects of local pride and indices of local identity. Helped by old and new media, speakers of these local languages engage in projects of language conservation, codification, and revitalization. Many of these projects are funded by regional governments and

legitimated by international conventions on the preservation of immaterial (or intangible) cultural heritage (cf. Perrino 2013 for an illuminating study of the Italian regional Veneto variety) Any such project, however, quickly turns prescriptive and normative which inevitably leaves local speakers who do not conform to the prescribed norms (doubly) marginalized. What we see here is in effect a new center of power arising within the periphery.

Cornips et al. (2011, 2012) investigate how different actors (individual as well as collective actors) engage with these power dynamics and make use of linguistic resources in the formation of local identities. They demonstrate how processes of local identity formation are driven by power asymmetries between people living in the center and periphery when people in the periphery make use of their heightened consciousness of local language(s) and indexically re-order them in relation to other (standard and/or prestige) varieties. The center-periphery dynamics has received far too little attention from both linguists and social scientists, while the power imbalance (both perceived and measured) between a dominant area and the rest of the country is a major catalyst in the formation of local identities throughout Europe. Moreover, the social significance of the center-periphery dynamics can be identified not only at the national level but also, recursively, at 'lower' levels, within regions of the nation, and even within cities and even smaller local entities (cf. Eckert 2011, Gal and Irvine 1995).

Globalizing forces and advances in media technologies have made people in the periphery more than ever before aware of differences between themselves and those occupying the center. Recent economic and demographic trends have marginalized inhabitants of peripheral regions even further within the nation state. Those areas suffer often from demographic 'shrinkage' and aging, with destructive effects on local social infrastructures: the closing of shops and pubs, and the decline of clubs and music bands. It is, therefore, important to investigate how people in peripheral areas and regions throughout Europe find ways to (re)shape and strengthen local identities in these times of rapid social change.

Questions that are important to address include: what are the effects of forces of linguistic unification and nation-state formation on local language use and ideologies? How is a 'peripheral' place imagined and constructed as different by its inhabitants and 'outsiders' and what is the role of old and new media in this process? Which linguistic resources are perceived as uniquely local, and are valued as quintessential

features of local identities? What are the intertwined perceptions on local languages as threatened and treasured heritage, as vehicles of oral traditions and expressions, and as markers of identity? When does everyday language become a conscious performance of linguistic uniqueness? And in relation to which old and new language-ideological hierarchies?

Summarizing what we have surveyed so far: new forms of global economic activity have sometimes profound effects on the sociolinguistic landscape and the sociolinguistic relations in groups in the periphery. They offer new kinds of economic opportunity in areas that are quite often economically marginalized, and the emblematic features of marginality — an imagined and cultivated form of unspoiled authenticity — is the very stuff that can be commodified. Thus, these new forms of economic activity result in new interventions and new positions for local cultural resources, including (local) language resources. They are often a factor of language survival, almost always an engine for language change, and also affect the repertoires of local speakers.

4. Conclusions

Let us by way of conclusion reiterate the main methodological argument we have developed in this paper. A study of globalization in the margins is important, for it can ‘balance the books’ of a sociolinguistics of globalization by adding insights from places not usually or immediately identified as ‘globalized’ or ‘superdiverse’. As to how such studies can proceed, we propose to focus on the specific, often partial levels of access to infrastructures of globalization that characterize the margins of the world system. The specific forms of access to such infrastructures — we focused on new technologies, new forms of economic activity and new forms of local identification — provide a precise diagnostic of what can and does happen in the margins, and how differences with what happens in more central places can be adequately explained.

It also takes care of the danger of a metropolitan bias in work on globalization. What is needed is a local description of available and accessible infrastructural resources, precisely balanced against broader translocal, global, forces and influences. No benchmarks, other than loosely informative ones, ought to be used. And it is from such an analysis of local conditions that we can understand local outcomes. We know

that globalization infrastructures enable and sustain connections between scale-levels — they enable, concretely, a boy from rural Thailand to text with his relative in Germany; and they enable Parisian tourists to engage in township tourism in Soweto. Effects, consequently, need to be situated and appraised at the level of interscale mobility: does access to infrastructures of globalization generate interscale mobility for people in the margins? If so, which specific forms are possible and which remain closed? And if not: how come?

It is from considering factors of infrastructure and their effects on local sociocultural economies that we will begin to understand critical factors of inequality and marginalization. The margins of the world system did not appear just like that: they have histories, presents and futures. Interscale mobility is part of the presents and the futures; it is vital that we manage to be specific and precise in understanding which futures it might offer.

Notes

ⁱ The gap is bigger than what we discussed here. A recent special issue of *Journal of Sociolinguistics* edited by Theresa Lillis and Carolyn McKinney, argues that *writing*, and literacy in general, have been neglected in mainstream sociolinguistics, and advocates attention to the sociolinguistics of writing as a firmly embedded ingredient of a comprehensive sociolinguistics. See Lillis and McKinney (2013) and Lillis (2013).

ⁱⁱ See <http://www.guardian.co.uk/global-development/2012/jun/13/west-africa-high-speed-broadband>. At the time of writing, a large sea cable project bringing broadband access in Africa closer to the level of Europe is being completed.

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